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SUBJECT: POLISH LEFTIST LEADER OUTLINES RECOVERY STRATEGY

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe, Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Grzegorz Napieralski, Chairman of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), blasted the intransigence of the ruling Civic Platform (PO) party, a stance that has forced the SLD into tactical alliances with President Kaczynski and the Law and Justice (PiS) party on some votes. Despite his own party's internal battles -- he narrowly ousted moderate rival Wojciech Olejniczak in May for the party chairmanship -- Napieralski expressed confidence in plans to build a united left that will support a common slate for the June 2009 European Parliament elections and, eventually, a single candidate for the Polish presidential elections in ¶2010. The slowing economy may revive the left somewhat, but Napieralski's small and badly divided party faces a long road back to power. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Grzegorz Napieralski told the Ambassador December 9 that the ruling Civic Platform (PO) party was worried about the deepening international financial crisis, and many members are calling for early elections before the party loses popularity. Napieralski said the PO's "arrogance" in dealing with other parties was based on high ratings in public opinion polls; the ratings and the arrogance are only now starting to fade. He said he had reached out to the PO shortly after his May election as head of the SLD, but the PO ignored his call for compromise along the lines of similar PO compromises with its left-leaning coalition partner, the Polish People's Party (PSL).

¶3. (C) On the other hand, Napieralski chuckled, President Kaczynski was "too eager" to meet with him, although too many meetings would not be good for the SLD. (COMMENT: In August, Napieralski met with the President and agreed to help sustain the presidential veto of a PO-proposed media law when PO-SLD talks broke down. The move cleverly positioned the SLD to be the tie-breaker on votes to overturn vetoes, but it cost the SLD public support, since many erstwhile backers were appalled by cooperation with the party's arch-enemy, PiS. END COMMENT.)

¶4. (C) The most bruising party fights are internal ones, Napieralski said, referring to his ongoing battle to remove Wojciech Olejniczak as the party's parliamentary caucus chairman, after ousting him as party chairman in a May SLD election. However, he expressed optimism about the prospects for a united left slate of candidates for the Euro parliament elections in June 2009, particularly now that the rival Social Democracy of Poland party (SDPL) is splitting. Napieralski was to fly December 9 to Brussels for a meeting with Poul Rasmussen, head of the European Socialist Party. He said he hoped to increase SLD's delegation from 8 to 10 Euro deputies, by picking up backers of two extreme parties, Self-Defense (SO) and the League of Polish Families (LPR), which are no longer represented in Poland's national

parliament. Napieralski hoped to announce the slate of SLD European candidates around New Year's.

15. (C) Napieralski said he would not run for the presidency in the June 2010 elections, but he planned to announce in the summer a single candidate of the left. He said Poles were tired of the bickering between the likely right-wing candidates, Prime Minister Tusk and President Kaczynski; it would be unhelpful to announce a SLD candidate at this time, since he or she would constantly be called upon to comment on the Tusk-Kaczynski feud. Napieralski reiterated that under President Kwasniewski, co-habitation had been much smoother, and arguments between the President and Prime Minister were kept private.

16. (C) Napieralski said that if elected, an SLD government would focus on better jobs with decent wages, education (particularly higher education), and foreign policy. He said the SLD would maintain the strong relationship with the U.S., pursue effective integration within the EU, and serve as a better bridge between Russia, on the one hand, and the U.S. and the EU on the other. He acknowledged that Polish-Russian relations had improved under the Tusk government, but not enough, in his view. Napieralski said his party would oppose Missile Defense, since it preferred a "diplomatic resolution;" did not support a system that only protected the U.S.; and did not see how the program would protect the United States from terrorists. (COMMENT: He appeared to see MD as focused against a threat from Al Qaeda rather than Iran. END COMMENT.) He accepted the Ambassador's offer to set up an Embassy briefing on MD.

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17. (C) Biographical note: Napieralski pointed out that his home is in Szczecin, the furthest point from Warsaw in Poland. He lamented the poor air and road connections to Szczecin from Warsaw, that complicated his weekend visits to his wife and young daughters. Napieralski's older daughter, a five-year-old, recently went to the hospital emergency room with a medical condition that doctors have thus far been unable to diagnose.

18. (C) COMMENT: The SLD's current small size has not made for cohesion. Napieralski barely defeated Olejniczak, a representative of SLD moderates and an advocate of collaboration with the PO, in the May election for the party chairmanship; other moderate heavyweights like former Interior Minister Ryszard Kalisz threaten to leave the party if Napieralski takes the party too far to the left. A recent poll of SLD members reflected some surprisingly pro-business views for a party of the left, and a near-even split on fundamental issues, from gay rights to the role of former President Kwasniewski. Some question Napieralski's strategy for unifying the Polish left; a Rzeczpospolita interviewer told Napieralski that a number of SLD members believe he is just as heavy-handed in his talks with small left-wing parties as the PO is with him.
ASHE